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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 002000

SIPDIS

STATE FOR PM/WRA - DEBORAH NETLAND
STATE ALSO FOR SA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2015

TAGS: [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [FAID](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: SUSPECTED TIGERS ATTACK US-DONATED
DEMINING TRUCK; ONE KILLED

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (SBU) Fredrik Palsson, Chief of Party for RONCO, the contractor for the US-funded humanitarian demining program, contacted poloff the morning of November 25 to report that at about 7:45 p.m. the previous evening in the Point Pedro area of Jaffna suspected Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) militants had thrown a grenade into a truck donated to the program by the US. Five Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers had been injured in the attack; one of the injured died later that night. At least one civilian was injured when the SLA returned fire following the attack, Palsson reported.

¶2. (SBU) The truck had been out on a supply run for the humanitarian demining unit storekeeper, Palsson reported, although why it was out after dark was unclear. (SLA Director of Operations later told DAO that the soldiers had been directed to change camps at the end of the work day and were en route to the second camp at the time of the attack.) No RONCO personnel were in the truck at the time of the attack. Palsson added that Brigadier General Ananda Chandrasiri, Commander of the Engineering Brigade, was en route to Jaffna from Colombo to look into the incident.

¶3. (SBU) The truck, one of a fleet of 13 donated by the US, is white and has markings clearly identifying it as belonging to the humanitarian demining program. (Smaller markings identify the truck as having been donated by the U.S. Government.) Since it was dark at the time of the attack, however, it is unclear whether the attackers could see the markings, Palsson commented. The LTTE has never attacked any US-funded humanitarian demining vehicles or personnel in the past. Noting that at about the same time, suspected LTTE cadres had thrown a grenade at an SLA vehicle in the eastern district of Trincomalee, injuring two soldiers, Palsson suggested the possibility that the attacks had been coordinated.

¶4. (C) Comment: We believe that the LTTE did not target the truck because of its US affiliation for several reasons. The LTTE has no history of attacking U.S.-funded projects--a point their proxies have stressed to us a number of times. Moreover, that it was dark at the time of the attack (making the vehicle difficult to identify), that the truck was not on a regularly scheduled run, and the proximity of the time of the attack to the upcoming Heroes' Day (November 27) all suggest that the LTTE selected the truck as a target of opportunity, rather than because of any connection to either the US or humanitarian demining. Nonetheless, we have to let the LTTE know that such unprovoked violence is unacceptable and undermines our ability to continue supporting the demining program, which provides significant humanitarian and economic benefits to the local civilian population of Jaffna.

We will register our strong protest of this attack with the Tigers through the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo and will also give a strong message to the Tamil National Alliance (TNA).

LUNSTEAD